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ABSTRACT

The Disney film "Pocahontas" appears to be an attempt to respond to growing cultural diversity, calls for multiculturalism, and strong female role models in the United States. This paper provides an analysis of the film, examining how Disney's claims to the creation of positive, pro-social representations of women and Native Americans in "Pocahontas" hold up or collapse when viewed from a critical feminist perspective. The paper first looks at the historical background of the film, at what historical information was used accurately and what was omitted or changed, noting the Eurocentric bias of written accounts from the early 1600's from what is now Virginia. A synopsis of the Disney film is then presented. Next, the paper provides a textual analysis of the film, focusing on the construction of the character and her relationships, on the premise that Pocahontas's character sends mixed messages to young viewers: her body is drawn as a mature and sexual woman--an exotic male fantasy--but she is independent and adventurous, a feminist role; she is sensual and in tune with nature, but her heightened spirituality is a stereotype of Native American spirituality; she rejects a dependable man, a hero of her tribe, later choosing the adventure of being with Captain Smith, a dangerous man and one she ultimately cannot have. In the end, she must pay dearly for her strong character traits, by remaining behind when Smith returns to England. The paper's concluding section notes that on the positive side, "Pocahontas" begins to fill a void in film offerings for children with strong female and ethnic role models, and its underlying theme of respect for nature or eco-consciousness is important and timely. On the negative side, however, the film manifests the limitations of a serious cultural critique attempted within a market context; the film also glorifies Native American religious beliefs, which are increasingly exploited for commercial purposes. (HTH)

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Pocahontas: Problematizing the Pro-Social

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Pocahontas: Problematizing the Pro-Social

by Amy Aidman and Debbie Reese

Introduction

The intertwining of race and gender is central to this critical textual analysis of the movie Pocahontas, a recent Disney production. Released in the summer of 1995, Pocahontas is a full-length, animated film about the meeting of two different cultures and races during a period of history (early 1600's in what is now Virginia) in which Native Americans and European explorers and settlers were in struggle with each other. Specifically the movie is a romantic fantasy, set in an historical framework, involving the coming together of a man and woman of different cultures in an interracial relationship.

Recent Disney movies, and in particular, Pocahontas, appear to be attempts to respond to the growing cultural diversity, calls for multiculturalism, and strong female role models in the United States. The character Pocahontas has been called a feminist role model for girls by the popular press and the portrayal of Native Americans has been lauded as culturally sensitive. The Native Americans in Pocahontas have "come out from behind the rocks" (Appleford, 1995), and are not merely the stereotypically stealthy enemy typical of Hollywood westerns (Stedman, 1982). Predictably new issues of representation have arisen.

While we have moved beyond earlier depictions of wilting heroines and bad guy Native Americans in Pocahontas, these recent portrayals are part of an ongoing process of change, and as such still have their problematic elements with which we must grapple. How do Disney's claims to creation of positive pro-social representations of women and Native Americans in the movie Pocahontas hold up or collapse when viewed from a

critical feminist perspective? This paper closely scrutinizes the movie to address that question, foregrounding the analysis in historical research of the period. In light of the received history of the period, which has come down to us through the writings of Europeans, we examine the romanticized story Disney has chosen to tell.

Historical Background

Pocahontas has been called America's first heroine. In producing its Pocahontas, Disney clearly conducted historical research of the period. From our own research it is clear that some of what Disney's research team learned was used in the movie, while some was changed or omitted. This is standard for historical fiction, yet it is important to examine the choices made by the filmmakers and to interrogate those choices.

The historical accounts of the period which are available were written by English men, from a Eurocentric perspective, through the eyes of explorers and settlers. The lives of the Native people in Virginia were interpreted in terms of English culture, and gross cultural differences in value systems frequently resulted in misinterpretation of practices and lifestyles. For instance, the explorers and settlers were Christians, and could not comprehend a culture in which sex was not associated with sin, free from constraints of religious dogma.

Evidence of Disney's research can be seen in several aspects of the film. For instance there are numerous proper names in the film that can be found in the historical accounts. On board the Susan Constant (one of the ships that brought the English to North America) was a privileged English nobleman, Sir George Percy (Mossiker, 1976). Disney developed a character named Percy, and although Percy is a dog, he is a noble dog with arrogant mannerisms and all the trappings of royalty. Other names recorded in

historical documents that Disney used in the film were: Kekata, Thomas, Namontack, Ratcliff, and Quiyoughcohannock (Barbour, 1970). Another example of the film's use of historical research is the blue necklace which figures prominently in the film as a symbol of marriage and a connection to Pocahontas' dead mother. Blue glass beads were an item the English offered to Powhatan (Pocahontas's father) in exchange for corn. Powhatan was particularly taken with them and willingly bartered for them. A third notable example is Disney's accurate portrayal of lifestyle, housing, and clothing specific to the river tribes of the eastern coast (Mossiker, 1976).

Of greater significance, however, is the evidence of Disney's research into the characters of Pocahontas, John Smith, and the history surrounding their relationship. Historical documents indicate Pocahontas was an outgoing, adventurous child who was indulged by her father. Disney's characterization shows her to be full-grown at the time of meeting John Smith. Pocahontas was not the voluptuous young woman Disney presents when John Smith arrived in Virginia.

The 144 white men aboard the Susan Constant, the Godspeed and the Discovery were not the first white men seen by Pocahontas. Her father had feasted with white men in the village in 1605 (Barbour, 1970). In May of 1607 (the year of the movie Pocahontas), the English established Jamestown, the first permanent English colony (Cocke, 1995). Smith was not among the first to leave the ship and explore the area, as he was lying low because of earlier accusations of mutiny. During the summer months, he became a significant figure to the starving colony as he secured food by trading with the Indians. Throughout these months, the English and Powhatans engaged in skirmishes over land, food, and weapons.

In December of 1607, John Smith was captured for trespassing on sacred land, treated kindly and fed well before he was taken to Powhatan. Smith's execution was ordered by Powhatan. Before his order was carried out, the child Pocahontas protested by throwing her body over his, asking that his life be spared. Her father honored her request, saying that Smith would live to make hatchets for Powhatan, and bells, beads and copper for Pocahontas. Whether or not the execution was merely a staged event signifying adoption and initiation into the tribe, or an actual threat to Smith's life is not clear. Furthermore, the event itself may never have happened. Smith's account written at the time doesn't mention it, but he recounts the story in later writing, when some speculate he may have been trying to gain court favor (Barbour, 1970; Lemay, 1992; Mossiker, 1976). The day after the execution episode, Smith and Powhatan formed an alliance. As part of the agreement, Smith was to provide Powhatan with guns. In return, Powhatan would give the colonists corn and land near the village where he could protect them from enemy tribes. Smith was then set free, and with three Indian men, returned to Jamestown.

As they approached Jamestown, he ordered the sentries on duty to fire the big cannons, knowing full well the thundering explosion would frighten the Indians into running away without the promised weapons. In the days following his return to Jamestown, in his swaggering way, Smith told tales of his adventures, including the riches of Powhatan's large storehouses of food and his idea that the rocks along the Pamunkey contained minerals. Because the Virginia Company had originally been formed in the hopes of finding minerals, Smith's idea was seized upon and an expedition planned. Smith was ordered to visit Powhatan, and the two men warily revisited the details of their alliance. To demonstrate the peace between the two groups, a young English boy, Thomas

Savage (there is a Thomas Savage in the film), remained with Powhatan. A young Indian boy, Namontack (in the film, Namontack is the first Native American wounded), went with the English. No minerals were found, but trade continued between the Powhatans and the colonists.

Tensions grew when the untrusting Smith influenced the Jamestown council to take captive and torture the Indians who entered the fort to trade. While torturing one of the Indian men, Smith extracted a story from him that the Indians were going to attack the fort. Later, when Thomas Savage delivered turkeys to Jamestown, Smith took him captive, preventing his return to the village. Tensions escalated, and Powhatan sent the 12 year old Pocahontas to Jamestown to ask for Thomas Savage's return. The colonists who had not seen a female in a long time, were charmed by her antics and beauty. All the captives were released, peace was restored, and Pocahontas returned to her village.

Later that year, Smith would visit the village and see Pocahontas participate in a harvest fertility ritual reserved only for mature women. At the end of the ritual, Smith was taken to a longhouse, his way lighted by a torch held by Pocahontas. He does not record sexual intercourse with her, retiring, as Mossiker (1976) writes "into his customary reticence on the subject of interracial sex." (p. 114).

The final meeting between Smith and Powhatan, took place in a longhouse in Powhatan's village in the autumn of 1608. It became clear that peace was ending. Believing his life was in danger Powhatan left the longhouse with his children. From quarters deep in the forest, he planned to kill the untrustworthy Smith who was spending the night in a village longhouse, believing himself safe because of the superiority of his weapons. During the night, Pocahontas returned to the longhouse to warn Smith of the

impending attack. The motivation for her act of treason may have been a strong physical attraction to Smith, but Mossiker (1976) believes her motivation was based more on her attraction to the exotic ways of the English settlers.

In the years that followed, Smith became president of the colony (Barbour, 1970, Fletcher, 1928; Mossiker, 1976), and fought with Indians from many different tribes. Life in Jamestown was always under the threats of starvation and Indian attack. In 1609, Smith was wounded by the accidental explosion of a powderbag that tore the flesh from his lower body and upper thighs. The injured Smith returned to Jamestown, where he was once again accused of mutinous behaviors, including charges he had been plotting to marry Pocahontas as a means to gain the Powhatans as an ally, and thereby assure his rule of the colony (Barbour, 1970; Fletcher, 1928; Mossiker, 1976). He was sent back to England in disgrace, without attempting to say goodbye to Pocahontas. Noting his absence and not knowing of his departure, she believed him to be dead.

The relationship between the Indians and the English continued to deteriorate. Fighting continued, and Pocahontas no longer journeyed to Jamestown to provide the settlers with corn. In 1609, Pocahontas married Kocoum (in the film this is the warrior she rejects for John Smith), a Patawamake man (Mossiker, 1976). The marriage lasted three years (Sharpes, 1995), then, according to reports, Kokoum died.

In 1613, at the Patawamake village, Pocahontas was lured onto the ship of Captain Samuel Argall who, although he had been fighting with the Powhatans, had been able to establish a friendly relationship with the Patawamakes. Pocahontas was taken captive, and a messenger sent to Powhatan, demanding all the English hostages, corn, swords, and other weapons be returned to Argall in exchange for Pocahontas. While in

captivity the English "covered her nakedness" (Mossiker, p. 166) and began teaching her about the English way of life, as well as providing her with religious instruction. No longer could her bold and spontaneous nature have its way, as she learned the ways of the English. Her breasts were bound, her waist cinched in whalebone, her natural spirit quieted. All this, she reportedly embraced quickly. She became the first convert to Christianity and was given the name of Rebecca at her baptism. One of her instructors was John Rolfe, a widower, who fell in love with her.

After several months of not hearing from Powhatan regarding the ransom of his daughter, Argall took Pocahontas and Rolfe aboard a ship to Powhatan's village. Historical records indicate Pocahontas went on shore, telling her people that surely her life was worth more to her father than swords and axes. She declared her intent to remain with the Englishmen, of her own accord. Powhatan agreed to peace negotiations, Pocahontas married Rolfe in April of 1614, and the following years were known as the Peace of Pocahontas. Although she did not return to visit her home, she surrounded herself with her people, bringing attendants and relatives to live with her. After the birth of their son in 1615, Pocahontas and Rolfe went to England. While in England, she was regarded as a Princess, met Queen Anne and became a favorite of the court. Her attendance at plays and balls was highly sought after.

Mossiker (1976) suggests Pocahontas' Indian attendants and relatives helped her perform traditional rituals when her son was born, supported her natural desires to breastfeed the child herself, and on her deathbed, performed traditional healing ceremonies.

Although John Smith wrote to Queen Anne of being rescued by Pocahontas, he did not attempt to see her until 1616. He did not announce himself, and when Pocahontas saw him, it was a shock. Until that moment, she had believed him dead. Seeing his face, she withdrew from her guests and did not reappear until several hours later, when she rebuked him for failing to call on her. In the spring of 1617, Pocahontas became ill with a respiratory or pulmonary infection. While en route aboard a ship to Virginia, she became deathly ill with pneumonia, and was taken ashore at Gravesend. She died in March of 1617. At her death, her Indian attendants and relatives observed traditional bereavement rituals, but were not allowed to perform burial rituals on her body. At the time of her death, she was 21 years old.

Disney's Pocahontas: A Thumbnail Sketch

The year is 1607. As Englishmen board their ship, the Susan Constant, bound for Virginia, they sing of the freedom and riches they will find there: "For the New World is like heaven, and we'll all be rich and free" and "On the beaches of Virginny, There's diamonds like debris. There's silver rivers flow, And gold you pick right off a tree." Adventure awaits as well, and John Smith will lead them, particularly in their anticipated fights with the Indians, which Smith expects to be "fun".

Across the ocean, Pocahontas' people are celebrating the return of their warriors, who have been fighting an enemy tribe in defense of the safety of their own villages. Pocahontas' father, Powhatan, tells her that Kokoum, a young heroic warrior, wants to marry her. The idea of marrying such a serious man doesn't appeal to Pocahontas. During her father's absence, Pocahontas has been having a dream she doesn't understand, about a

spinning arrow. She turns to Grandmother Willow, a 400-year-old spirit who lives in a willow tree, for advice and comfort concerning the dream, and the marriage proposal.

When the English expedition reaches Virginia, Pocahontas and John Smith meet and are instantly romantically attracted to each other. Magically, she suddenly understands and can speak English, and proceeds to introduce John Smith to her world, in which every rock, tree, and creature has a living spirit. While Pocahontas and Smith spend more time together, falling in love, the English are establishing a settlement and searching for gold. Tensions rise between the English and the Indians and both sides prepare for battle.

Pocahontas and Smith, wanting to fulfill their desire to be together without betraying their respective people, meet to form a plan to head off the battle. Kokoum, searching for the missing Pocahontas, finds them in a lover's embrace and attacks Smith. The young Englishman Thomas, who has been ordered to follow the errant Smith, witnesses the embrace, and the attack by Kokoum. Thomas shoots Kokoum, killing him. Smith is captured, accused of killing Kokoum, and his execution is ordered. When Powhatan stands poised over Smith to kill him, Pocahontas throws herself over Smith's body, proclaiming her love for him, and saying, "(t)his is where the path of hatred has brought us." Hearing the wisdom in her words, Powhatan declares that he will not start the battle. At that moment, the greedy, English Governor Ratcliffe aims his gun and fires at Powhatan. Smith leaps before Powhatan, taking the bullet himself. The wound is serious, he must return to England for care, and the story ends with the tender parting of Pocahontas and John Smith.

Textual Analysis

Disney's Pocahontas is a character who carries mixed messages to young viewers. This section focuses on the construction of the character and her relationships, as well as what happens to her in the story. How does Pocahontas compare to other Disney heroines and how may we interpret her story in relation to that of Disney's other animated female stars? How does the "colonialist imaginary" (Shohat, 1991) figure in the construction of the Native American Pocahontas and her romantic involvement with the Anglo explorer John Smith?

It is important to note that Pocahontas is the only animated Disney movie based (loosely) on a real person. Unfortunately, it is also the only Disney movie of its genre whose protagonist is Native American. A common stereotype of Native Americans is that of a people who **once** lived on this continent. The movie reinforces this common misconception (especially among young white children) of Native Americans in North America as extinct or even mythical peoples (Shaffer, 1993). Disney is riding the wave of recent North American films which "...reflect a pronounced interest in Indians not as faceless savages who fire arrows at the good guys from unseen hiding places but as members of dynamic cultures." (Appleford, 1995) Unfortunately, it also enforces the more recent stereotype of Native American as noble savage.

The first scene of the film in which Pocahontas appears establishes her as a young woman who possesses great beauty and grace. She has a Barbie doll body--tall, with long, muscular legs and arms, huge breasts, a tiny waist, a long neck. Feminist arguments point out that holding up these unrealistic body images to young audiences is unhealthy. Not only can girls self-esteem be endangered when they compare their own bodies to

Hollywood's representations of the ultimate desirable woman, but with the epidemic of eating disorders in this country, it is clear that aspiring to unrealistic body shape and weight, can cause serious illness, both psychological and physical.

Reports indicate that the character was drawn from blended images of top fashion models, Iman and Kate Moss, and Princess Tigerlily from Disney's Peter Pan (Muldoon, 1995). She has long flowing black hair, dark skin, high cheek bones, big black eyes, a full mouth, and an ethnic nose--not the button nose of Snow White or Cinderella. She has more in common with Disney's other ethnic heroine--Princess Jasmine of Aladdin. One writer (Disney, 1995) called her a character that just about any (heterosexual) male, animated or otherwise, would desire. Compared with other Disney heroines, such as Snow White, Cinderella, or Belle (from Beauty and the Beast), she is just as beautiful, only sexier, more sensual, and exotic.

Early in the movie the character and personality traits of Pocahontas are made clear. First of all, she is off by herself enjoying nature. She is independent, adventurous, courageous, and athletic. No stumbling through the woods by the helpless female as she is pursued by some villain. Pocahontas' dive off the waterfall is a moment that frames her as a thrill seeker, confident in her physical ability, and sensual in the pleasure she takes in nature. She is spontaneous, mischievous, playful, and defiant. In comparison to her more sedate friend and foil, Nakoma, she is clearly a high energy, dominant female figure.

From a feminist perspective it is gratifying to see Disney departing from the female leads who are forever in need of rescue by the hero. Cinderella would have continued as a servant, without her fairy godmother and her prince. Snow White would have been killed if not for the kindness of the woodsman, or forever banished without the dwarfs, and her

prince. Sleeping Beauty would have slept forever without her prince. Even Jasmine, who shows some intelligence and independence, has ultimately to be rescued by Aladdin, in order to have some choice as to her future mate.

Unlike other Disney heroines, Pocahontas does not live happily ever after with her Prince Charming. She pays dearly for all of those strong character traits. At the end of the movie John Smith is wounded and has to be taken back to England for medical treatment. Pocahontas decides that she is needed by her people and can not go with him. The resolution of the relationship between the two is to always be together in spirit. This ending to the movie is not necessary for dramatic purposes. Since the real Pocahontas ended up marrying a white man and traveling to England, it is not necessary for historic accuracy. It can only be viewed on the one hand as a subtext that a strong woman can not have it all and on the other hand, as Disney's inability to imagine sanctioning an interracial relationship in one of its animated films.

This is particularly intriguing when considering the barriers other animated characters have had to overcome on the way to romantic fulfillment. Snow White and Cinderella had help in battling the evil intentions of wicked and powerful stepmothers. Their beauty and goodness entitled them to supernatural assistance to an enchanting future.

The issue of class has to be overcome in a number of the movies. Only magic is able to conquer the class barrier. Cinderella is a servant and has to be transformed by her fairy godmother's magic before she can win her prince. Princess Jasmine is under decree to marry only royalty and it is the genie's power that helps Aladdin, the "diamond in the rough" to reveal his inner prince in order to become an acceptable match for her.

The Little Mermaid (Ariel) and Belle from Beauty and the Beast both have unproblematic liaisons with animal-like characters. Disney sanctions cross-species romantic involvements in these two films. It seems that even bestiality is preferred by Disney to the possibility of the consummation of an interracial romance.

Like the other Disney heroines, Pocahontas has the animals and birds on her side. This is a feature that is virtually part of every animated Disney movie. But, the barefoot and scantily-clad Pocahontas' relationship with animal and plant life goes beyond the others. She has a mystical, spiritual relationship with nature. The spirits of the earth, water, and sky are actively instructing her, helping her to see her future and to make important decisions. The scenes in which she consults Grandmother Willow (an anthropomorphised tree) exemplify her mystical relationship with nature. While it makes for enchanting visuals, this heightened spirituality is among the new but, increasingly common stereotypes of Native Americans in Hollywood films.

Most, if not all, of the Disney heroines are motherless. If there is a living mother, she is an evil step-mother. Pocahontas' grandmother is a tree spirit and her dead mother is personified as the wind. Her father tells her that the people look to her mother (the wind) for leadership and that one day they will look to her. One reading of this is that Pocahontas too can hope to be as ephemeral as the wind.

Another way in which the post-colonial imaginary of Hollywood's movie-makers comes into play is through Pocahontas' choice of love interests. Her rejection of the notion of marrying Kokoum, a heroic man among his people, is quite shallow. "He's so serious," she says. She figures that marrying him would be the end of her life. With that rejection of the familiar, she embraces a Western perspective on individual destiny. The notions of

tradition and the common good are sacrificed for a sense of fulfillment through involvement with the unknown. It also conveys to young girls that a dangerous man is preferable to a solid serious man for a mate.

Pocahontas' immediate attraction to John Smith is really a bit questionable. Her friend Nakoma's reaction on first sight of him is more natural--she is shocked by such an unusual looking human. The movie does not provide a reasonable explanation for a Native American woman's attraction to this Nordic-looking character. He is constructed to fit Hollywood notions of white male hunk and that should be good enough to make him universally attractive.

On several levels Pocahontas, "... as a metaphor for her land, becomes available for Western penetration and knowledge." (Shohut, p.57) To the character John Smith, Pocahontas is clearly one more conquest. She has to disobey her father and betray her people to be with him. Her desire to be with him is responsible for Kokoum's death. To the producers of the film, the metaphor is taken one step further. The character is the product of the colonial gaze, not only in her physical features and attitudes, but in the way she is rescued from a life of serious pursuit of the common good, by an adventure with the irresistible John Smith.

By the movie's end, Pocahontas realizes the importance of her people's need for her as a leader. This seems almost an afterthought for the movie-makers, an excuse to keep her from the romantic fulfillment which has traditionally been the reward of the animated Disney sisterhood. So, as she must be satisfied with a tree for a Grandmother and the wind for a mother, she has to learn to live with the ghost of a romance sacrificed for the future of her people. John Smith came, conquered her emotionally, and left.

Although the filmmakers make fun of the greed of the English explorers, depicting them as destroyers of the land, disrespectful of nature, crude and barbaric invaders with no regard for the native inhabitants of their new world, the conflicts are diffused by the end of the film. John Smith and Governor Ratcliffe return to England. Pocahontas has a broken heart, but will rise to lead her people. John Smith is physically wounded, but will heal. Kokoum, whose only fault was his seriousness, is dead. As a man of color and competition for the white man's female object of desire, he had to die. Having the film end this way is a clean way to eliminate having to deal with the suffering of Native American people throughout history through the present, at the hands of the European settlers.

Conclusion

In this concluding section we want to emphasize the complexity of the subtexts in Disney's Pocahontas. As we have discussed, the messages about strong women and Native Americans are mixed. While perpetuating some stereotypes, others are diffused. This section will also address the meanings and implications of the Pocahontas story, as received history and Disney's commodification of it with the movie and inevitable product spinoffs.

On the plus side, it is important to recognize that the movie Pocahontas begins to fill a void in film offerings for children with strong female, ethnic role models. The portrayal of indigenous people is more well-rounded than earlier representations in Hollywood children's films. Native people are shown within their communities and families, rather than as isolated savages. For parents and teachers, the movie can be used as a springboard for discussion with children of issues related to native people in this country. In addition it can provide a point for starting to delve into the history of this

period. Finally, the underlying theme of respect for nature or eco-consciousness is important and timely.

While noting Disney's socially conscious intentions, they can not be considered out of context. Obviously, the driving force behind the movie is economic. The Pocahontas costume was the best selling Halloween costume at Toys R Us (Time Magazine, 1995), and Disney claimed its first printing (2.5 million copies) of the movie tie-in children's book Pocahontas was the largest first-printing in America (Reid, 1996).

Pauline Turner Strong (1995) articulates the inherent contraditions well:

"Pocahontas raises a number of difficult and timely issues...a tribute to its seriousness and ambition. Indeed, the film begs to be read as a plea for tolerant, respectful, and harmonious living in a world torn by ethnic strife and environmental degradation. That Pocahontas is rife with tensions and ironies is also a testimony to the limitations of serious cultural critique in an artistic environment devoted to the marketing of dreams. That our children are surrounded with Pocahontas hype while being called to treat other cultures and the land with respect requires us to clarify for them the difference between consuming objectified difference and achieving respectful relationships across difference." (Turner Strong, 1995).

Another troubling aspect of the movie is its glorification of Native American religious beliefs. Today, that spirituality is increasingly exploited for commercial purposes. Laurie Anne Whitt (1995) makes the point that intentional or not, this kind of cultural imperialism serves to "..extend the political power, secure the social control, and furthers the economic profit of the dominant culture. The commodification of indigenous spirituality is a paradigmatic instance of cultural imperialism." (p.2).

In essence, while the Pocahontas story is viewed by Euro-Americans as a tale of cross-cultural understanding and tolerance (and the movie reinforces that view), it can also be seen as a tragedy for the woman Pocahontas, not to mention a turning point in the conquest of Native peoples and their land. Pocahontas, as the first indigenous person to convert to Christianity, is a symbol of the acceptance of European cultural domination. She went from being an adventurous, free, high-spirited child to becoming a tightly bound proper Christian woman, married to a man for whom she reportedly felt no great passion, far from her home in a foreign land. Ultimately, she died of disease contracted in England. She was only in her early 20's when she died. According to reports grave robbers attempted unsuccessfully to sell her remains. In spite of attempts to locate them, Pocahontas remains have never been found (Mossiker, 1976).

The historical record says that after being kidnapped by the English, Pocahontas willingly and quickly accepted Christianity and English customs. Perhaps her willingness was really resignation. Her father wasn't coming up with the ransom - what could she do? Although she was a favorite at court, it is possible that she was primarily a curiosity. There is no indication in the written history that her English hosts changed their ways or ideas because of their interactions with her. What we celebrate about Pocahontas are the ways in which she was expedient to European imperialism.

While the movie version does not end in the usual romantic fulfillment viewers expect from a Disney romance, that is a far gentler fate than the real life Pocahontas and the descendants of her people suffered.

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